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**Student and staff expectations and experiences of a UK –  
China Transnational Education collaboration**

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Abstract

**Purpose:** This study explores perceptions of a Transnational Education (TNE) course taught by UK teachers at a Chinese university. Our aim was to ascertain similarities and differences in perceptions of staff at both institutions and their students to help inform future TNE design and provision.

**Method:** Teaching staff in the UK and China and two cohorts of Chinese students completed surveys including both open and closed response questions exploring their expectations, perceived benefits and challenges of the programme.

**Findings:** Prior to the course commencing, differences were identified between UK and Chinese teachers in their perception of the risks and benefits of the course and the challenges students might face. Differences were also seen in teachers' and students' views about why students enrolled and their expectations about the course.

**Originality:** The TNE is no longer running and many of the reasons for this were identified by our participants before the course had begun. This suggests the importance of engaging with various stakeholders in the setup of TNE to ensure a close match between staff, student and institutional expectations of the course.

**Keywords:** transnational higher education; staff and student expectations; collaborative education; China; flying faculty;

## Introduction

Transnational education (TNE) involves the provision of study programmes by institutions in one country to students in another (Wilkins, 2016). TNE can take various forms and can lead to a host of benefits to both partners, including financial growth, skill development, and the promotion of cultural awareness (See Mellors-Bourne et al, 2013; and Mellors-Bourne, Jones & Woodfield, 2015, for reviews). Research in this area has typically focussed on exploring TNE at an institutional level and has found that these partnerships can be challenging to develop and maintain (Healey 2015, 2016; Wilkins 2016). However, research exploring the experiences of staff and students involved in TNE has been relatively limited (O'Mahoney, 2014). The current paper addresses this gap, exploring perceptions of students and staff involved in a partnership between institutions from the UK and China. We measured similarities and differences in UK and Chinese staff, and Chinese student attitudes and expectations towards the collaboration. Based on this, we make recommendations for others considering developing similar programmes.

### Benefits of TNE

In 2012-13 it was estimated that 2,785 TNE programmes were being delivered by 63 UK higher education institutions (Mellors-Bourne, et al, 2014) and by 2015-16 in China alone, 65,200 students were studying for UK higher education qualifications (HESA, 2017). The importance of TNE to UK providers is reflected by the recent creation of a UK-wide system of quality enhancement for TNE provision, based on consultation with UK Higher Education institutions (QAA, 2020). Although TNE is thought to generate a range of benefits, such as internationalising the curriculum and increasing the potential for research collaboration (See Mellors-Bourne et al, 2013; and Mellors-Bourne, Jones & Woodfield, 2015, for reviews)

exporting governments such as the United States, Australia and the UK have encouraged higher education institutions to see increasing overseas student numbers as an important source of revenue (Garrett, 2004). As a result, several commentators have argued that British institutions are mainly motivated to engage in transnational education for financial reasons (Olcott, 2008; Tilak, 2011). Host governments on the other hand often appreciate the broader benefits of TNE, such as in increasing the knowledge base and skill-levels of their population. The Chinese government, for example, has viewed TNE as an important factor in facilitating rapid economic and social development (Hou, Montgomery & McDowell, 2014). As the number of TNE programmes has increased, so too has academic interest in the area. The resulting literature has focused on several themes ranging from how such programmes are managed at institutional level to the complexity of aligning different quality assurance and regulatory regimes (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016). However, the academic literature has tended to focus upon a strategic level of analysis (e.g. policy, trade, quality assurance) whereas issues relating to teaching and learning have received less attention (O'Mahoney, 2014). This leaves a gap in our understanding as we know relatively little about how staff and students "on the ground" and on both sides of the programme feel about the benefits and challenges of TNE to themselves and their University. This is the gap the current study aims to fill.

### Teaching and Learning in TNE

Studies specifically exploring teaching and learning in TNE have examined practical factors such as the effectiveness of cross-cultural teaching and learning (Miliszewska & Sztendur, 2010) and how teachers negotiate cultural differences they encounter whilst teaching abroad (Tiong Seah & Edwards, 2006). Research has also explored the pre-delivery training of staff intending to teach overseas. For example, Gribble and Ziguras (2003)

proposed that more assistance for teachers involved in TNE should be provided to facilitate communication between teaching staff, orient visiting teachers to the educational context of the host and help teachers make their teaching more relevant to the new context. Dunn & Wallace (2006), emphasise the potential of tutors at the host institution as an important resource for supporting and preparing incoming teachers to experience a foreign classroom. Overall, however, this literature has focussed on how to facilitate teaching once the TNE collaboration has been set up rather than examining and improving the processes involved in its development. This raises questions about the extent to which staff who will be teaching on TNE programmes are invited to contribute to the planning stages of such collaborations. A survey of 32 UK universities (O'Mahoney, 2014) found that leadership for TNE collaborations varied, with some being led at institutional level and others at faculty/college or school level. It seems likely that the involvement of teaching staff in planning will also vary depending on the institutional level at which the partnership is being managed and developed. For some collaborations this could mean that teaching staff are only consulted when the TNE is fully agreed and teaching materials need to be developed, for others, teachers may be involved throughout the planning stages. It is also likely that the extent to which staff are involved in planning may impact upon their motivation to engage with the collaboration. Healey (2018) found that one of the main problems cited by managers of TNE collaborations in UK Universities programme was resistance or even open hostility from staff regarding engaging with the TNE programme, often because it impaired their ability to focus on their research. However, there is little research exploring how staff in receiving institutions feel about TNE. In order to gain a greater understanding of these issues, in the current study we examined the attitudes of teachers at both sending and host institutions.

Why do TNEs fail?

TNE programmes are costly to develop, both financially and in terms of staff time, so it is important to explore what leads to their success or failure. Previous research suggests that understanding student perspectives could be key to this. The UK Quality Assurance Agency explored the development of 10 partnerships between Chinese and UK institutions which it had originally reviewed in 2006 (QAA, 2013). Their findings presented a mixed picture. Six of the collaborations changed substantially, for example through adjusting the nature of the partnership e.g. from the programme being taught wholly in China to an articulation arrangement providing entry to UK study in the final year. It was not clear from the report to what extent teaching staff involved in these collaborations were consulted about these changes. Two other collaborations had ceased altogether and only two were continuing unchanged. The report concluded that key challenges which had led to the failure of TNE partnerships were the decline in student enrolment on the programmes or lower than expected numbers progressing to study in the UK. This suggests that understanding students' attitudes and expectations and the reasons for their enrolment is crucial in the development of successful programmes.

Student enrolment: Push and pull factors

In order to understand why students enrol in TNE programmes, researchers have utilised the 'push-pull model' (e.g. Chen, 2007). Push factors operate in the students' country of origin whereas pull factors are those which operate in the host country. Mazzarol and Souter (2002) found that key push factors included the belief that the foreign degree was better than a local one, the wish to gain an understanding of the foreign culture or having an intention to migrate, and an inability to gain entry to higher education programmes in their own country. Important pull factors included the reputation of the destination country, students' knowledge of that country and the costs involved. However, Wilkins, Balakrishnan & Huisman (2012)

found slightly different push and pull factors. Their key push factors were linked to an inability to gain access to an appropriate higher education programme in their home country. Pull factors were due to personal circumstances, such as convenience and attractiveness of studying in the UAE and the reputation of the international university. This suggests that different push and pull factors may be important in influencing students' choices to study on different TNE programmes dependent on context. In the current study, we were interested in what push and pull factors had influenced the enrolment decisions of our students. We asked both students and teachers about the reasons why students had enrolled on the programme in order to explore how closely teachers' and students' views were aligned.

#### Staff and student expectations of the programme

The current study also explored teachers' and students' expectations about the programme itself. It is important to understand more about how the perceptions of staff who are creating TNE programmes map onto those of students, in order to provide clearer insights into how such programmes can be improved. This could also facilitate the development of programmes which meet and allow better management of student expectations. In terms of staff expectations, whilst there is limited research, Hill, Cheong, Leong and Fernandez-Chung (2004) state that trust is vital to TNE. They argue that overburdening or marginalising academics can lead to friction and strain in relationships. On the other hand, there has been a substantial amount of research carried out to explore the expectations of home and international students entering higher education (e.g. Lowe & Cook, 2003; Smith & Hopkins, 2005). This has shown that incoming students can often have unrealistic expectations about the reality of university study, including about the amount of contact time they will have with staff, their workload and about how they will be taught. We are not aware of any research similar to that reported here which looks at the expectations of students enrolling on higher



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education programmes run by overseas institutions in their home country. This indicates an important gap in the literature.

The current study

The current study explored student and staff experiences of the development of a TNE programme developed between a British and Chinese University. Staff from the collaborating departments of the UK and Chinese University were asked to complete a questionnaire exploring their perceptions of the programme. It was hypothesised that Chinese and UK teachers would differ in their involvement with the development of the collaboration, their perceptions of how the collaboration would impact upon them personally, and why they believed their university was engaging in the collaboration. Staff also completed open response questions to explore why they thought the students had enrolled onto the programme, potential benefits and risks involved in the collaboration, and concerns about issues Chinese students might face. Chinese students in Year 1 of the programme were also asked open questions about why they had enrolled, the potential benefit of the course for them and concerns they had about studying on the programme and finally, what their expectations were about the programme.

Method

Participants

Participants in the staff cohort were 10 UK university lecturers who all had responsibility for teaching psychology (4 male; 6 female) from a mixture of ethnic backgrounds and 20 university lecturers in China (7 male; 13 female) all of whom were Chinese Nationals. There were also 102 student participants (38 male; 64 female. Mean age 19.74 years) who were

recruited across two different cohorts. Around 81% of students in both cohorts took part in the study: 46 out of 57 students from the first cohort (19 male; 27 female. Mean age 19.77 years) and 56 out of 69 from the second (19 male; 37 female. Mean age 19.73 yrs).

## Context

Proposals for the current TNE collaboration between a School of Psychology in the UK and one in China, were initially instigated at Faculty level. The approach was part ‘flying faculty’, with UK teachers visiting the host institution to carry out two-week blocks of intensive teaching, and part online distance learning. To fit with the four-year Chinese degree, students enrolling on the collaborative programme took the first three years of the Chinese degree but in their second and third year also took three UK modules in each year (six overall). These were designed to be versions of core Year 1 and 2 modules taught in the UK. All assessments were marked by UK staff, but two postdoctoral members of Chinese staff acted as teaching assistants during the intensive teaching blocks and carried out an invaluable liaison role both during teaching visits and when students were studying remotely. In an articulation agreement between the two institutions, students who passed at least five out of these six ‘bridging’ modules were eligible to enrol at the UK institution to study their final year and receive a discount on typical fees for international students.

## Instruments

### *Teacher questionnaire*

The teacher questionnaire was available in both English and Mandarin. UK lecturers responded in English and the Chinese lecturers responded in Mandarin. Mandarin responses were translated by a researcher who was not part of the project or collaboration. The first section of the questionnaire contained forced choice items to which participants rated their

agreement on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These items asked staff members about i) their involvement with the development of the collaboration, ii) how the collaboration would impact upon them personally, and iii) why they believed their university was engaging in the collaboration (see Table 1). Teachers were then asked to respond in their own words to questions which asked iv) why they thought the students had enrolled onto the programme, v) about the potential benefits and risks involved in the collaboration, and vi) what concerns they had about issues Chinese students might face, either when studying in China or when studying in the UK in their final year. The questionnaire for UK teachers only, also included questions asking them about the extent of their involvement in the development of the teaching collaboration, in order to gauge how many of the UK respondents had been those contributing to programme and teaching preparation.

*Student questionnaire*

The student questionnaires were written and responded to in Mandarin so that all students, regardless of English language level would be able to access and respond to the questionnaire accurately. Responses were translated by the same researcher who translated the staff responses. The questionnaire contained several free response questions intended to mirror those asked of the teachers, in order to ascertain similarities and differences. Therefore students were asked their thoughts about why the Chinese institution had become involved in the collaboration (see Teacher survey iii), why they had enrolled (iv), what the potential benefits were to them (v), and to explain any concerns they had about studying on the programme (vi). Finally, they were asked what their expectations were about the programme.

The list of questionnaire items can be found in Appendix A.

*Procedure*

All teachers in both the UK and China were initially invited to participate in the survey via email. Paper copies of the questionnaire along with an information sheet and a short debrief were then delivered to all staff, and post boxes were set up in communal staff areas to allow questionnaires to be returned anonymously. Teachers read the information sheet but did not sign it in order to ensure anonymity. They then completed the questionnaire and returned it to the envelope before posting it. Students taking the programme were asked to complete the questionnaire on the first day of teaching. They were given information about the study during class time and then asked to complete the questionnaire. It was made explicit to the students that they did not need to participate if they did not want to and could leave the questionnaire blank. Students read and completed an informed consent sheet, worked through the questionnaire alone and then were given an oral debrief by classroom staff.

## Results

Comparing UK and Chinese teachers' attitudes: Quantitative data

Although all the teaching staff at the Chinese University ( $n = 20$ ) completed the questionnaire only 56% ( $n = 10$ ) at the UK University did so and only five of the UK respondents said they had been involved in planning and developing materials for the programme. The core team involved in developing the materials for the TNE comprised of around six people. Therefore, half of the UK respondents had not volunteered to be involved in the collaboration. The attitudes of UK and Chinese teachers to the collaboration were compared using MANOVA. Descriptive and inferential statistics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' attitudes to the TNE collaboration: personal involvement, personal impact and institutional rationale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

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	UK Teachers		China Teachers		Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	
Thinking about the collaboration...					
...I have been consulted extensively.	4.20	.63	4.11	.83	ns
...I feel fully informed	4.00	.94	3.94	.87	ns
...I have had sufficient opportunity to consult with colleagues from my institution.	4.80	.42	3.94	.73	$F(1,22) = 11.059, p = .003, \eta p^2 = .34$
... I have had sufficient opportunity to consult with colleagues from the overseas institution.	2.20	1.23	3.22	1.22	ns
... I would have liked to be more involved in planning.	1.70	.82	4.22	.73	$F(1,22) = 54.826, p < .001, \eta p^2 = .71$
The teaching collaboration will...					
...provide me with an opportunity to conduct cross-cultural research.	3.44	1.13	4.06	1.00	ns
... increase my opportunities to make international collaborations.	3.44	1.24	4.00	1.06	ns
...help me develop my teaching skills.	3.89	1.17	4.41	.71	ns
... increase my teaching load.	4.22	.97	2.88	1.27	$F(1,22) = 8.998, p = .007, \eta p^2 = .29$
... increase my marking load.	4.22	.97	2.53	1.23	$F(1,22) = 12.189, p = .002, \eta p^2 = .36$

...increase my administration duties.	4.00	1.12	2.65	1.32	$F(1,22) = 10.703, p = .003, \eta p^2 = .33$
My university has engaged in the collaboration...					
...to increase the opportunity for staff to make international research contacts.	2.80	1.40	4.45	.76	$F(1,22)=14.523, p=.001, \eta p^2 =.39$
...to give Chinese students an opportunity to learn psychology in the UK.	3.11	1.27	4.55	.69	$F(1,22) = 20.583, p < .001, \eta p^2 = .48$
...to learn more about the overseas HE system.	2.20	1.23	4.05	.76	$F(1,22) = 22.370, p < .001, \eta p^2 = .50$
...to increase revenue.	4.60	.70	4.06	.73	$F(1,22) = 5.966, p = .023, \eta p^2 = .21$
...because there is external pressure to set up such collaborations.	3.90	.99	2.35	1.04	$F(1,22) = 11.736, p = .003, \eta p^2 = .34$

Note: *ns* = not significant. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

In terms of preparing for the collaboration, teachers in both countries felt that they had received adequate information and had been consulted appropriately. However, Chinese staff were more likely to say they would have liked greater input into planning the collaboration. Also, whereas UK and Chinese teachers felt similar about the level of consultation they had with their overseas colleagues, Chinese teachers were less likely than those in the UK to say they had enough opportunity to consult with colleagues in their own institution. When asked about the personal impact of the collaboration there was a clear distinction in the responses of UK and Chinese teachers. Although they tended to agree to that it would open up opportunities for professional development, unsurprisingly, the UK teachers were far more likely than Chinese teachers to say that the collaboration would involve an increase in their teaching, marking and administration workload. Furthermore, when asked about the reasons

for the collaboration, the Chinese teachers appeared less sceptical of the reasons for initiating the collaboration; being more likely than UK staff to say that the university was motivated by wishing to help staff increase their international research contacts, to give Chinese students an opportunity to study in the UK and to learn more about higher education in an overseas context. On the other hand, UK staff were more likely to say that their university was under external pressure to set up such collaborations and they agreed more strongly that the aim was to increase revenue.

Qualitative data procedure

In order to analyse participants’ open written responses a content analysis was conducted. We first identified common themes emerging in response to each item. For example, from participants’ responses to the question ‘What are the potential benefits of the collaboration?’, the following categories emerged: ‘Personal development’; ‘Financial (to the School)’; ‘Developing an international outlook’; ‘New teaching developments’; and ‘Opportunities for cross cultural research’. Then for each theme we quantified the number of different participants who provided a response that fell into that category. Where participants made comments falling into more than one category each comment was counted, meaning that we were able to calculate the percentage of participants that provided a particular response for each theme. Categorisation of responses was checked by an independent rater who analysed a random sample of 19.6% of overall responses. Interrater agreement was confirmed for 92.8% (141 out of 152) of responses and all disagreements were resolved by discussion.

Comparing UK and Chinese teachers’ attitudes: Qualitative data

When asked about the benefits of the collaboration, similar proportions of UK and Chinese teachers said it could help the school develop an international outlook (UK; 40%: China;

45%); encourage new teaching developments (30%: 25%) and facilitate personal development (30%: 35%). However, whereas none of the Chinese academics mentioned financial benefits of the collaboration 50% of UK respondents talked about how the collaboration could benefit the school financially.

When asked about the potential risks of the collaboration around 45% of Chinese staff said there were no risks at all, whereas none of the UK staff said this and all of them identified at least one potential risk. These risks were an increase in workload [60%], loss of income for the school [30%] and reputational risk for school [20%]). Interestingly, around 20% of both Chinese and UK teachers pointed to the risk that only low numbers of Chinese students might choose to transfer to study their final year in the UK.

Comparing teachers and students: student enrolment and concerns about the programme

The teacher and student questionnaires included similar free response questions which asked why students had enrolled on the programme and to describe any concerns they had about studying for the UK degree (or for teachers, ‘concerns you have for the students...’). In response to the question asking why students had enrolled, it was noticeable that a greater proportion of teaching staff at the two institutions (57%) said that the students had enrolled to study in the UK than did the students themselves ( $\chi^2 [1, N = 132] = 19.40; p < .001$ ). In fact, only 23% of students in cohort 1 and 13% of those in cohort 2 said that they joined the programme with the intention of travelling to the UK to complete their final year. Some Chinese staff members did seem to be attuned to the intentions of the students, however, similar proportions of Chinese teachers (40%) and students (C1 39%; C2 38%) commented that students may have enrolled on the programme to gain access to a Chinese university, whereas only one UK tutor suggested this might be a possibility:



‘Some students have enrolled onto this programme for studying abroad. Others have enrolled because of their comparatively low scores on the College Entrance Exam; they had to accept this in order to enter university’. [Chinese teacher 9].

‘I had to enrol on this programme because I have failed to get into the university of my first choice after the University Entrance Exam’. [C1 student 22].

‘First my grades of entrance exam for university are low. Second, I like psychology’. [C2 student 44].

Somewhat reassuringly, a majority of students (C1 56%; C2 79%) in both cohorts said that they had enrolled because of their interest in psychology and / or desire to learn more about it, although this comment could refer equally to the content of their Chinese degree programme. Compared with the students, this factor was not acknowledged as frequently in the responses of the teachers from the two institutions ( $\chi^2 [1, N = 132] = 28.77; p < .001$ ). Also, although 60% of the UK teachers thought that students may have enrolled because of the status associated with gaining a UK degree neither the Chinese teachers nor the students mentioned this.

When asked to identify possible concerns about the programme, just over 80% of students in both cohorts expressed anxiety about their ability to cope with the English language demands of the programme:

‘I am worried about my poor English that I may not be able to understand the lectures conducted by foreign teachers’. [C1 student 7].

‘Not so good English. Communication difficulties. Unable to achieve a good performance’. [C2 student 50].

Although 60% of the UK teachers highlighted this as a potential issue only 40% of the Chinese teachers mentioned it and, compared with teaching staff as a whole, the students (around 82% in both cohorts) were more likely to mention language skills as a potential problem ( $\chi^2 [1, N = 132] = 15.44; p < .001$ ). On the other hand, the teachers (50%) were more likely to say they were concerned about students’ ability to adapt to different teaching methods whereas hardly any students (5%) identified this as a matter of concern ( $\chi^2 [1, N = 132] = 36.67; p < .001$ ). In fact, some students pointed to this as an interesting aspect of the programme (see below). Finally, when asked to identify potential barriers to studying the UK programme, just over 25% of the students in each cohort said they were concerned that the financial costs of travelling to study in the UK could be problematic compared with only one member of staff from either institution ( $\chi^2 [1, N = 132] = 7.43; p = .006$ ).

#### Student expectations about the programme

When asked what motivated the Chinese and UK institutions to create the collaborative programme, **almost half of** both cohorts (C1 43%; C2 46%) suggested it was to promote cultural and academic exchange, although the notion that the programme had been instigated specifically for the benefit of students was also popular, particularly in Cohort 2 (45%). In terms of the benefits of the programme, the three outcomes most commonly cited by students were the potential to improve students’ personal abilities (particularly to help others), to broaden their perspective, and to improve their English language skills:

‘The potential benefits are to improve my English ability, understand the differences of culture and thinking pattern between two countries, and broaden my vision’. [C1 student 12].

‘To help improve my English and learn better how to deal with others’.  
[C2 student 7].

Most of the students in both cohorts (C1 78%; C2 89%) thought the programme was going to be challenging and a majority (70%; 63%) believed that it would be taught and assessed differently to their Chinese degree programme but mostly students were unsure about what the differences would be. Despite this, when asked what they thought would be interesting about the programme students tended to mention finding out more about psychology (either generally or about specific topics) or carrying out practical work. Around 20% of students in both cohorts also appeared to be looking forward to experiencing a new (‘Western’) teaching style with their comments revealing an expectation that UK teachers would employ a more interactive and discursive style in the classroom. For example, saying it would be interesting to experience:

- ‘innovative and practical teaching and discussion’. [C1 student 38].
- ‘the discussion and interaction with foreign professors’. [C1 student 31].
- ‘different teaching approaches and English study environments’. [C2 student 15].
- ‘interaction activities with foreign teachers’. [C2 Student 41].

**Discussion**

Teaching staff: attitudes to the collaboration

Although staff from the UK and China were aware of the economic incentives for their institutions to take part in the collaboration, around half of UK teachers felt the main benefits of the programme would be financial, whereas Chinese staff and students focused more upon notions of academic exchange and development. This is in line with the notion that UK-based and other exporting institutions tend to be motivated to engage in TNE partnerships for financial reasons whereas it has been China's stated policy that collaboration of this kind is a public good (Hou, Montgomery & McDowell, 2014). Furthermore, at the beginning of the collaboration, UK teachers were more likely to consider potential negative impacts on them and their school, when compared to their Chinese colleagues. This fits with Healey's (2018) findings that UK-based managers often face resistance from academic staff towards engaging in TNE collaborations. On the other hand, Chinese staff members did not identify any potential risks. This is not surprising as almost all the preparatory work, programme delivery and administration was carried out by UK staff. The only exception was in the day-to-day support provided at the host institution by two staff from the Chinese institution. Therefore, while most Chinese staff were unlikely to become involved in the collaboration, even those UK staff who had not been involved at the time of the survey could see a possibility of being asked to take part at some later date and were concerned about how this would impact their workload and their school. This raises important questions about how, when developing TNE programmes, UK Universities can allay such concerns by setting clear expectations about the potential impact on staff. As Healey (2018) suggested, a key concern for staff is that TNE provision may take time away from research. It is therefore vital to ensure that staff receive fair credit for any additional workload and reduction in other teaching responsibilities or recognition that research activity will likely be impacted. Depending on institutional policy, a reduction in research output may have a detrimental impact on prospects for promotion and progression. Thus, when developing TNE programmes our findings suggest that it is

important to have a clear and flexible workload allocation associated with this and clear incentives relating to promotion which allay staff concerns. This may also help to reduce resistance in staff.

Despite direct involvement in the project being limited to a small number of staff at each institution, many participants in both the UK and China said they would have appreciated the opportunity for more discussion about the partnership. Interestingly, Chinese teachers were more likely to say they would have preferred more discussion with their local colleagues, suggesting that there had been less opportunity for teachers to discuss the collaboration within the host institution.

Staff and students: Student enrolment

In terms of the push and pull factors previously identified as motivating student enrolment, the accounts provided by students were informative and, in some cases, strikingly different to those identified by staff. The two main reasons given by students in both cohorts for enrolling onto the programme were an interest in psychology and the desire to gain access to a higher education programme in China. This issue has been identified previously (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Wilkins, Balakrishnan & Huisman, 2012) and is entirely consistent with the situation in China where there is fierce competition for higher education places. Interestingly, of the factors proposed by Mazzarol & Soutar, only two others were mentioned by staff or students. A small majority of UK teachers thought that students might have been influenced by the reputation of the UK degree but hardly any of the students and none of the Chinese teachers said this. Also, while around half of the teachers (from the UK and China) said that students would be influenced by the opportunity to transfer to study in the UK in their final year, very few students in either cohort said this. Interestingly, in both cohorts a minority of students mentioned cost, which has previously been viewed as a pull

factor in enrolment choices, as a potential deterrent. Overall, then, the teachers did suggest factors that have been identified previously as motivating student enrolment. However, in this context the overriding influence on student decisions to enrol on the programme was the opportunity to access higher education in their home country. If this had been known at the outset of the programme, it may have been possible to predict the potential number of students eventually transferring to study their final year in the UK with greater accuracy.

#### Staff and students: Programme expectations and concerns

It was interesting that comparatively few Chinese teachers highlighted the language barrier as a potential concern for students enrolled on the programme. Most (around 82%) of the students we surveyed were concerned about their ability to cope with the demands of being taught in English and indeed many students did struggle with understanding the lecture material and in producing their assignments in English. Although this issue was alleviated slightly during face-to-face tuition by the presence of the Chinese liaison staff in class it persisted in the written work submitted by students for assessment. Clearly, this issue is not specific to the programme reported here. For example, in its review of UK TNE collaborations in China the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 2013b) report many of the institutions surveyed had concerns about students' English language proficiency. To assist our students in developing their English language skills, after the first year of teaching it was agreed to arrange a programme of additional intensive English language classes for students taking the programme. However, possibly because only a small proportion of the students in each cohort intended to study in the UK, only a few students attended this programme and it did not lead to a noticeable improvement in student performance.

Interestingly, whereas the UK and Chinese teachers thought students might find the difference between 'Western' and Chinese teaching styles problematic, very few students

mentioned this, while some of them thought it was going to be interesting to experience a different style of teaching and were looking forward to it. Previously, dealing with differences in learning and teaching styles has been identified by UK staff as one of the most challenging aspects of teaching on TNE programmes (O'Mahoney, 2014) so this discrepancy between the views of staff and students enrolled on the programme needs consideration. One explanation could be that in responding to our survey the students were thinking mainly about class sessions which they correctly perceived to have a practical orientation and where they anticipated a more discursive 'Western style' of delivery. It seems that Chinese teachers were mistaken to believe that the students would be worried about this.

Programme outcomes

In line with the results of our survey, very few students took up the opportunity of study in the UK for the final year of their degree. In part this can be explained by the relatively small number of students who said they had enrolled in order to study in the UK. Additionally, financial factors, some of which were beyond the control of the two institutions, could have played a part. Students enrolled on the collaborative programme were offered a discount on the fees typically paid by international students to study at the UK institution. Even so, in our survey around a quarter of the students in each cohort mentioned concerns they had about the financial cost of UK study. However, the Chinese Ministry of Education carried out a review of the collaboration and feedback to the Chinese institution indicated that future validation of the partnership would depend on changes being made which would require more modules to be delivered by the UK partner. Given the low numbers of students choosing to study at the UK institution and the increase in resources from the UK institution required to deliver more teaching, the decision was taken that the collaboration was no longer cost-effective and the partnership was terminated by mutual agreement. In essence, therefore, some of the



challenges already identified as affecting other UK institutions working on TNE partnerships in China, such as low numbers progressing to study in the UK and changes to regulatory demands (QAA, 2013b), were instrumental in bringing the partnership to an end. Our programme is not unusual in this, and many TNE projects are being withdrawn due to growing scepticism about the net economic benefits of TNE and the sustainability of TNE models (see Healey, 2019 for a review). Although it has recently been suggested that UK involvement in TNE may be about to enter a period of decline (Healey (2020) the continued importance of TNE to UK providers is reflected by the recent creation of a UK-wide system of quality enhancement for TNE provision, based on consultation with UK Higher Education institutions (QAA, 2020).

#### Limitations and future directions

The small sample size relative to the number of dependent variables on the teacher survey raises potential concerns about the power to detect effects using a MANOVA. However, the relatively robust effect sizes noted in Table 1 give confidence in the differences that emerged between teachers from the UK and those from China. Moreover, the patterns detected with this analysis were strikingly similar to those that emerged in an additional analysis (not provided here, but available from the authors), using a series of t-tests with Bonferroni correction on the survey variables. Future research involving a larger sample could further assess the differing perceptions between teachers from the UK compared to teachers from China. Furthermore, as our preliminary results seem to suggest that those in the host institution felt more concerned about the collaboration, more research is needed, using interviews or focus groups, to better understand the reasons for these concerns and how they could be alleviated. This research could also explore how successful different TNE arrangements have been dependent on whether they were instigated and/or led at institutional,



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school or faculty level. This could impact feelings of ownership and level of collaboration between teaching staff, which in turn is likely to impact student and staff experiences and ultimately the success of the programme.

**Conclusions**

In its review of UK / China TNE partnerships (QAA, 2013) the UK Quality Assurance Agency has highlighted a number of important factors to consider when planning TNE collaborations particularly in terms of UK institutions ensuring they are familiar with current Chinese regulations and making realistic forecasts of the number and nature of students to be recruited, including their English language requirements. These issues have been identified as challenges in previous TNE partnerships and to some extent were problematic here. It was notable, however, that many of the challenges that later emerged in our collaboration were foreshadowed in teacher and student responses to our survey at the outset of the programme. Potential concerns expressed by Chinese and UK teachers were not always the same, reflecting differences in background knowledge and the imbalance in responsibility for the programme and its administration, but in combination they were able to pinpoint many issues that later proved to be problematic, in some cases supported by the comments of the students. If the main challenge is to create TNE partnerships which are robust enough to withstand such challenges, greater consultation with staff and students on the ground could be beneficial when developing TNE agreements. Keay, May, and Mahoney (2014) have utilised the concept of ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015) as a framework to examine how more effective TNE collaborations can be created by focusing upon the quality of the relationship between partners. Essentially, this requires greater emphasis upon the processes by which the partnership is going to function and develop, rather than its outcome. Fundamental to this is the development of shared goals and

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3 commitment to the project amongst teaching staff and the mutual engagement of both parties  
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5 through joint activity and sharing of information and resources. By developing a sense of  
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7 ownership of the project amongst staff (and ultimately students) then it becomes easier to  
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9 anticipate problems and develop strategies to overcome them. The results of our survey  
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11 suggest that taking account of the knowledge and expectations of staff members at partner  
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13 institutions and encouraging greater interaction between them may also help to identify  
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15 possible challenges and solutions at an early stage. Furthermore, ensuring that the student  
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17 voice is heard in the development of TNE agreements may lead to longer term success in  
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19 terms of enrolment.  
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Appendix A- Questionnaires

Teacher Questions

Likert-style response items

1. Thinking about the proposed teaching collaboration, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

	Disagree Strongly	Disagree Moderately	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree Moderately	Agree Strongly
I have been consulted extensively on the proposals for the collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
I have had sufficient opportunity to discuss the collaboration with colleagues from [the UK].	1	2	3	4	5
I have had sufficient opportunity to discuss the collaboration with colleagues from [China].	1	2	3	4	5
I would have liked to be more involved in planning the collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel fully informed about the teaching collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5

2. Thinking about how the proposed psychology teaching collaboration will impact upon you and your colleagues, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

	Disagree Strongly	Disagree Moderately	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree Moderately	Agree Strongly
<b>The proposed teaching collaboration will...</b>					
...provide an opportunity for me to conduct cross cultural research	1	2	3	4	5
...increase my opportunities to make international research collaborations	1	2	3	4	5
...help me to develop my teaching skills	1	2	3	4	5

...increase my teaching load	1	2	3	4	5
...increase my marking load	1	2	3	4	5
...increase my administration duties	1	2	3	4	5

3. Thinking about why the University is engaging with the proposed collaboration, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

	Disagree Strongly	Disagree Moderately	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree Moderately	Agree Strongly
<b>The University is engaging with the proposed collaboration...</b>					
... to increase the opportunity for staff to make international research contacts.	1	2	3	4	5
... to give Chinese students the opportunity to learn psychology in the UK.	1	2	3	4	5
...to increase revenue.	1	2	3	4	5
...to learn more about the overseas higher education system.	1	2	3	4	5
...because there is external pressure to set up such collaborations.	1	2	3	4	5

### Open response questions

1. [UK Teachers only] How involved have you been in the development of the teaching collaboration, and are you happy with your level of involvement? Which activities have you undertaken so far and which might you contribute to in future?

2. Why do you think the students have enrolled onto the collaborative course?

3. Chinese university students may be used to a different style of working to students in Western universities. Do you have any concerns about issues Chinese students might face, either when UK teachers are teaching [in China] or when the students study [in the UK] in their final year? Please explain.

4. UK university teachers may be used to a different style of working to teachers in Chinese universities. Do you have any concerns about issues UK teachers might face, either when teaching [in China] or when the Chinese students study [in the UK] in their final year? Please explain.



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- 3 5. Thinking about the teaching collaboration, what do you see as the **potential**
- 4 **benefits**, if any, for you personally and for the School / University?
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- 7 6. Thinking about the teaching collaboration, what do you see as the **potential risks**,
- 8 if any, for you personally and for the School / University?
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- 11 7. Would you like to be more involved with the teaching collaboration? If so, explain
- 12 in what way you would like to be involved. If not, please say why.
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17 **Student Questions**

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- 21 1. Please tell us your reasons for enrolling on the BSc Applied Psychology [China] /
- 22 BSc Psychological Studies [UK] degree course.
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- 24 2. What do you see as the potential benefits of studying on this course for you
- 25 personally?
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- 27 3. What concerns, if any, do you have about studying for the UK degree either while
- 28 you are [in China] or when you travel to the UK?
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- 31 4. What are your expectations of the course? For example, do you think it will be
- 32 easy or challenging? Which elements will be interesting? Will it be taught and
- 33 assessed differently to what you are used to?
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- 36 5. Why do you think [the two universities] have created this course?
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